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**DEVICE FOR DETERMINING AND/OR MONITORING THE
VOLUME, AND/OR MASS, FLOW RATE OF A MEDIUM**

The invention relates to a device for determining and/or monitoring
5 the volume, and/or mass, flow rate of a medium flowing through a
containment in a streaming direction. The device includes at least
one ultrasonic transducer, which emits and/or receives ultrasonic
measuring signals, and a control/evaluation unit, which determines
10 the volume, and/or mass, flow rate of the medium in the containment
on the basis of the ultrasonic measuring signals according to the
travel-time-difference principle or according to the Doppler principle.

Ultrasonic flow measuring devices are applied often in process and
automation technology. They enable contactless determination of the
15 volume, and/or mass, flow rate of a medium in a containment,
especially in a pipe.

Known ultrasonic measuring devices work either by the Doppler
principle or the travel-time-difference principle. In the case of the
20 travel-time-difference principle, the different travel time of the
ultrasonic measuring signals in the direction of medium flow, and
counter to the direction of medium flow, is exploited. To this end, the
ultrasonic measuring signals are alternatingly issued, and received, in
the direction of flow, and counter to the direction of flow. On the
25 basis of the travel-time-difference of the ultrasonic measuring signals,
the flow velocity can be determined, and, with that and known
diameter of the pipe, the volume flow rate of the medium, or, with
known density, the mass flow rate of the medium.

30 In the case of the Doppler principle, ultrasonic measuring signals of
known frequency are coupled into the flowing medium. The
ultrasonic measuring signals reflected in the medium are evaluated.

On the basis of a frequency shift occurring between the ultrasonic measuring signal which was coupled into the medium and the reflected ultrasonic measuring signal, likewise the flow velocity of the medium, or the volume, and/or mass, flow rate, can be determined.

5 The use of flow measuring devices working according to the Doppler principle is only possible, when present in the medium are air bubbles or impurities, on which the ultrasonic measuring signals are reflected. Thus, the application of ultrasonic flow measuring devices using the Doppler principle is rather limited, compared to ultrasonic flow
10 measuring devices using the travel-time-difference principle.

With respect to types of measuring devices, a distinction is drawn between ultrasonic flow measuring pickups that are inserted into the pipeline, and those known as clamp-on flow measuring devices,
15 where the ultrasonic transducers are pressed onto the pipeline externally by means of a clamp. Clamp-on flow measuring devices are described, for example, in EP 0 686 255 B1, US Patent 4,484,478 or US Patent 4,598,593.

In both types of ultrasonic flow measuring devices, the ultrasonic
20 measuring signals are radiated at a predetermined angle into, and/or received from, the pipe containing the flowing medium. In order to be able to radiate the ultrasonic measuring signals at a determined angle into, and out of, the pipe, or into, and out of, the medium, the in- and out-coupling of the ultrasonic measuring signals occurs in
25 clamp-on flow measuring devices via an interface piece, or coupling wedge. For achieving an optimum impedance matching, it is, moreover, known to make the coupling wedges of a suitably refracting material, e.g. a synthetic material, or plastic. Principal component of an ultrasonic transducer is usually at least one
30 piezoelectric element, which produces the ultrasonic measuring signals and/or receives them.

It is clear that the ultrasonic measuring signals are received strongly attenuated after passing through the medium and, in the case of clamp-on measuring devices, also through the pipe wall and, as the case may be, due to unfavorable impedance ratios in the in-coupling and out-coupling, respectively, into and out of the medium. In order to obtain usable measurement results, the received ultrasonic measuring signals must, therefore, be suitably amplified. The amplification lies usually in a range of 20-120 dB. The frequency of ultrasonic measuring signals lies in the range of about 100 kHz to 10 MHz. Electronic components working in this frequency range have a relatively high electrical current consumption, i.e. take a relatively high power.

An object of the invention is to provide a flow measuring device distinguished by a low electrical current consumption, i.e. a low power uptake.

The object is achieved by associating at least one component of high power uptake with the control/evaluation unit and by designing the control/evaluation unit such that the component of high power uptake is operated intermittently in a measuring phase and in an idle phase. In the measuring phase, the component of high power uptake is activated, while it has a reduced power uptake in the idle phase or is even turned off. As already mentioned earlier, the flow measuring device can be a clamp-on flow measuring device or it can be a measuring device which can be placed within the pipe. In the case of the component of high power uptake, such can be, for example, an amplifier, an analog/digital converter, a microprocessor or a programmable logic-component. According to the invention, it is possible to strobe a component with high power consumption in such a manner that the energy supply of the ultrasonic flow measuring device is assured.

By intentionally turning off only one component, the flow measuring device is ready to operate significantly faster upon the turning of such component back on, than if the power supply for the measuring device had been the component which was strobed. Thus, the turning of the power supply on and off would take a longer time, since, following a shutdown of the flow measuring device, a certain amount of time is always required, before a stable voltage can be available for operating the flow measuring device again. A further advantage of the component-wise strobing of the flow measuring device is to be seen, moreover, in the fact that the measuring performance, i.e. the number of measurements per unit time, is not decreased, as compared with non-strobed, continuous operation. Therefore, it is possible with the solution of the invention to perform a continuous measuring, despite the strobing of individual components.

An advantageous further development of the device of the invention provides at least one component having a switching function, with such component activating, or deactivating, at least one component of high power consumption. An example of a component having a switching function is a semiconductor switch.

An especially favorable embodiment of the device of the invention provides that, integrated into the component of high power take up, is a mechanism for decreasing the current consumption, or power take up. With this, an amplifier can be placed in a current-saving mode; a microprocessor can be placed in a sleep mode.

According to an advantageous further development of the device of the invention, it is provided that the time span between two successive measuring, or idle, phases of the component of high power uptake and/or the duration of a measuring, and/or an idle,

phase of the component of high power uptake is/are predetermined. An alternative form of embodiment provides an input unit, via which the time span between two successive measuring, or idle, phases of the component of high power takeover and/or the duration of a measuring, and/or idle, phase of the component of high power takeover is predeterminable.

An especially favorable variant provides that the control/evaluation unit determines the travel time of the measuring signals on the basis of predetermined system and/or process variables and specifies the time span between two successive measuring, or idle, phases of the component of high power takeover and/or the duration of a measuring, and/or idle, phase of the component of high power takeover, as a function of the determined travel time. Since, in this kind of specification of the measuring and idle phases, the characteristics existing at the measurement site are taken into consideration, this enables an optimal energy savings to be achieved, savings tuned to the particular application.

In certain applications, it can happen that, in spite of the strobing of the component(s) of high power requirement, the available energy is still not sufficient. In this case, an advantageous further development of the device of the invention provides that the control/evaluation unit determines the travel time of the measuring signals on the basis of predetermined system and/or process variables; additionally, the time span between two successive measuring, or idle, phases of the component of high power takeover and/or the duration of a measuring, and/or idle, phase of the component of high power takeover, is predetermined as a function of the determined travel time and as a function of the energy which is available.

Moreover, an advantageous embodiment of the device of the invention provides that assigned to the control/evaluation unit is an energy storage element, which is designed such that it can store at least the energy required in the measuring phase for operating the components of the control/evaluation unit, or of the flow measuring device, as the case may be.

The invention will now be explained in greater detail on the basis of the drawings, the figures of which show as follows:

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Fig. 1 a schematic drawing of an embodiment of the ultrasonic flow measuring device of the invention;

Fig. 2 a block diagram of a first form of embodiment of the device of the invention;

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Fig. 3 a block diagram of a second form of embodiment of the device of the invention; and

Fig. 4 a travel-time diagram of an ultrasonic measuring signal, illustrating the manner in which the device of the invention acts.

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Fig. 1 is a schematic drawing of an embodiment of the ultrasonic flow measuring devices 1 of the invention. The measuring device 1 is a clamp-on flow measuring device. In the illustrated case, the measuring device 1 determines the volume flow rate, or the mass flow rate, of the medium 4 according to the known travel-time-difference method.

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Essential components of the clamp-on ultrasonic flow measuring device 1 are the two ultrasonic transducers 5, 6 and the control/evaluation unit 11. The two ultrasonic transducers 5, 6 are

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mounted on the pipe 2 at a distance L from one another by means of
securement equipment not separately shown in Fig. 1. Appropriate
securement devices are sufficiently known from the state of the art
and are available from the assignee. The medium 4 flows through
5 the pipe 2 of inner diameter d_i in the streaming direction S .

An ultrasonic transducer 5, 6 has as an essential component at least
one piezoelectric element 9, 10, which produces and/or receives the
ultrasonic measuring signals. The ultrasonic measuring signals are
10 coupled via the coupling wedges 7, 8 into and out of the pipe 2
containing the flowing medium 4. A coupling wedge 7, 8 is designed
in known manner such that a best possible impedance matching is
obtained in the transition from one substance into the other. The
ultrasonic measuring signals propagate in the pipe 2 and medium 4
15 on the sound path SP . In the illustrated case, a so-called two-
traverse arrangement of the ultrasonic transducers 5, 6 is shown.
One traverse is that part of the sound path SP in which an ultrasonic
measuring signal crosses the containment 2 one time. The traverses
can, depending on the arrangement of the ultrasonic transducers 5, 6
20 and, as required, with the introduction of a reflector element into the
sound path SP , run diametrically or along chords.

The separation L of the two ultrasonic transducers 5, 6 is
dimensioned, to the extent possible, such that a large part of the
25 energy radiated into the pipe 2 from the particular ultrasonic
transducer 5, 6 is received by the other ultrasonic transducer 6, 5.
The optimum separation L of the two ultrasonic transducers 5, 6 is a
function of a number of system and process variables. If these
variables are known, then the optimum separation L of the ultrasonic
30 transducers 5, 6 can be calculated highly accurately using the travel
time of the ultrasonic measuring signals. Snell's Law is used in
known manner in the calculation. Especially relevant, as concerns

the system and process variables are the inner diameter d_i of the pipe 2, the thickness w of the pipe wall 3, the velocity of sound c_p in the material of the pipe 2, or the velocity of sound c_M in the medium 4.

5 Fig. 2 is a block diagram of a first form of embodiment of the device of the invention; Fig. 3 shows a block diagram of an alternative form of embodiment. The two block diagrams are greatly simplified: Thus, the device for exciting the sensors (emitting stage) has been omitted. A likewise usually present multiplexer serving for switching the
10 sensors has also not been drawn.

It was explained above that, depending on characteristics of the sound path SP, the received ultrasonic measuring signals must be amplified, in order that the flow measuring device 1 can deliver
15 usable and reliable measuring results. The required amplification lies usually in the range of 20-120 dB. Since the frequency of the ultrasonic measuring signals is in the range of about 100 kHz to 10 MHz, naturally, electronic components must be used for the amplification of the ultrasonic measuring signals that work in this
20 frequency range. Such components are characterized by a relatively high electrical current consumption, i.e. a relatively high power uptake. It is here that the invention comes in.

The ultrasonic measuring signals received by the piezoelectric
25 elements 9, 10 are amplified in the amplifier 13 using a suitable amplification factor. Subsequently, the ultrasonic measuring signals are digitized by the analog/digital converter 14 and forwarded to a microprocessor for evaluation. The evaluation can be done, for example, by the microprocessor 15. The mentioned components are
30 associated with a control/evaluation unit 11. If all components worked continuously, their power requirement per unit time would exceed the maximum available energy. According to the invention,

the control/evaluation unit 11 is designed such that at least one component 12 of high power uptake is operated intermittently in a measuring phase and in an idle phase. In the measuring phase, the component 12 of high power uptake is activated, while it exhibits a reduced power uptake, or is turned completely off, in the idle phase. Figs. 2 and 3 relate to the case where the component 12 of high power uptake is the amplifier 13 and/or the analog/digital converter 14. The microprocessor strobes the amplifier 13 and/or the analog/digital converter 14 such that it/they is/are active only during the measuring phase t_2 ; during the idle phase t_1 , the amplifier 13 and/or the analog/digital converter 14 is/are deactivated.

In the case of the embodiment of Fig. 2, the strobing of the amplifier 13 occurs by way of the switch 18 operated by the microprocessor 15. Switch 18 is, for example, a semiconductor switch. It is possible that the analog/digital converter is turned on and off by the switching of the strobe on and off. In the case of the form of embodiment shown in Fig. 3, the strobing of the amplifier 13 occurs via a component 21 integrated into the amplifier 13 and serving for reducing the power uptake of the amplifier 13. The strobed operating of the component 21 is done by the microprocessor 15.

The component 21 places the amplifier in a current-saving mode (e.g. a sleep mode) in a predetermined and/or calculated rhythm. The placing of the component 12 of high power uptake into the current-saving mode can occur either via interruption of the supply of power (in Fig. 2, the supply of power to the amplifier 13 is interrupted by actuation of the switch 18) or a sampling strobe, and no sampling strobe, are alternatingly applied to the pertinent component 12, e.g. the A/D converter 14. In the case of the last-mentioned option, use is made of the circumstance that electrical current consumption usually scales with the frequency of the applied strobe. Thus, this

embodiment is especially advantageous. Furthermore, the power uptake of e.g. the logic component 16 can also be controlled via the switching of the strobe on and off.

5 Fig. 3 shows the case where, besides the amplifier 13, also the A/D converter 14 and the logic chip 16 can be strobed. In principle, strobing is only done, when the available energy is not sufficient. This is especially the case, when the ultrasonic measuring device 1 is connected via a two-wire line with a remote control location and is
10 supplied with energy, power, from the control location via the same two-wire line.

The logic chip is, for example, a programmable logic device PLD. Programmable logic chips 16 are preferably used, when the
15 components to be strobed need to be rapidly turned on. By using the logic chip, the microprocessor 15 itself is unloaded. In particular, all operations which must be performed rapidly are preferably implemented in hardware in the logic chip 16 and not in software. A further variant provides that a processor core and the necessary,
20 rapid logic functions are implemented by the developer itself in an appropriate, programmable component. This variant goes under the heading SoPC (system on a programmable chip). If a PLD or an SoPC is associated with the microprocessor, then, in an embodiment of the device of the invention, it is also possible, depending on
25 application, to strobe at least this one component of the microprocessor, while the remaining component(s) is/are continuously supplied with power.

As already mentioned, instead of the semiconductor switch 18, a
30 mechanism 21 for reducing current consumption, or for interrupting current uptake, is directly integrated into the amplifier 13 in Fig. 3. In

this way, amplifier can easily be shifted into an electrical current saving mode.

Both Figs. 2 and 3 include, moreover, an energy storing element 20, especially a capacitor. This energy storing element 20 is activated, when, in spite of the strobing of the component 12 of high current consumption, the available energy is still not sufficient for operating the flow measuring device 1. The input/display unit 19 provides the interface for use by operating personnel.

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Fig. 4 illustrates the operation of the device of the invention on the basis of a travel-time diagram. The ultrasonic measuring signal leaves the ultrasonic transducer 5, 6 at time '0' and propagates, on the one hand, through the pipe wall (first peak) and, on the other hand, through the medium 4 (second peak). Fig. 4 also shows the typical appearance of a travel time diagram for the two-traverse arrangement of the ultrasonic transducers 5, 6 in Fig. 1.

In order that the second peak, thus the ultrasonic measuring signal representing the flow velocity of the medium 4, can be evaluated, the amplifier 13 must be activated during the duration t_2 of the so-called measuring phase. The measuring phase is bordered by the so-called idle phase, in which the amplifier 13 is deactivated. The idle phase lasts for the duration t_1 . The duration t_1 of the idle phase and the duration t_2 of the measuring phase are adjusted with respect to one another such that at least the ultrasonic measuring signals containing the information concerning the flow velocity of the medium 4 are received. Usually, the pulse length of an ultrasonic measuring signal is about 10 μsec . Usual pulse repetition rates lie in the order of magnitude of a few milliseconds. According to the invention, the component 12 of high power takeup, here the amplifier 13, is activated only during the period of time t_2 , when the ultrasonic

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measuring signal is arriving at the particular one of the ultrasonic transducers 5, 6 serving as the receiver. In this way, the average current consumption, or the average power consumption, is reduced in the ratio of the on/off periods t_2 / t_1 . If the on period t_2 amounts to 50 μsec and the off period t_1 is 5 msec, then a power savings of 100-
5 times results, as compared to continuous operation.

The travel time of the ultrasonic measuring signal can either be measured or calculated. A calculation of the travel time is possible,
10 at least to an approximation, when the geometric data of the pipe (d_i and w), together with the acoustic properties of the pipe and the medium (c_P and c_M), are known. Used in the calculation is Snell's Law.

List of Reference Characters

	1	flow measuring device	
5	2	pipe / containment	
	3	pipe wall	
	4	medium	
	5	ultrasonic transducer	
	6	ultrasonic transducer	
10	7	coupling wedge	
	8	coupling wedge	
	9	piezoelectric element	
	10	piezoelectric element	
	11	control/evaluation unit	
15	12	component of high current consumption	
	13	amplifier	
	14	analog/digital transducer	
	15	microprocessor	
	16	logic chip	
20	17	switching component	
	18	semiconductor switch	
	19	input unit	
	20	energy storing element	
	21	integrated mechanism for reducing power uptake	
25	22	power	supply